



BRUCELLOSIS - A STATEMENT FROM OUT VET TRUSTEE, ROGER BRALOW

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Brucellosis is a bacterial infection. There are many species of *Brucella* present in various animals, but in dogs we usually mean *Brucella canis*. It is spread from one dog to another through contact, especially mating, or with infected birth fluids or tissues. Puppies can get infected through milk. It can be inhaled or spread through urine. Often dogs with the bacteria will show no signs of illness, but can still pass it on. Many dogs do become unwell and can present with a variety of symptoms.

Unfortunately, dogs can pass this bacteria on to people. Humans can catch it from breathing it in or through contact with infected dogs. People with a weak immune system or pregnant mothers are more at risk. Caring for a dog that is miscarrying or giving birth is particularly high risk. Humans can show signs of fever, headache, joint pain or other flu-like symptoms. It can be quite serious or potentially life-threatening.

Recently there have been some cases in the UK in people (see more below) who contracted the illness from imported dogs. Dogs from Romania have been highlighted as a particular concern, however *Brucella canis* is present in other EU member states as well.

At Saving Strays we have been testing for Brucellosis for over two years before dogs come across to the UK. We test at the point of rescue now and again before travel. Any dogs travelling from next year will be tested by APHA on couriered samples before entering the U.K. Recently, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons has been trying to get the government to ensure pre-import testing to help mitigate the risks. The advice is now that all dogs, including ones that have been here for quite some time, be tested. The government testing agency APHA recommend that serum samples are submitted for *B. canis* SAT (Serum Agglutination Test) and *B. canis* iELISA. These tests are marginally more sensitive and specific than the ones available in Bosnia, and are now considered best practice. Because the bacteria can be asymptomatic, the general advice is that testing should be done 3 months after the last suspected exposure.



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FAQ

My Vet has seen my dog before without testing, why now? We are aware this change initially may seem odd. The rise in the global movement of pets is unfortunately bringing increasing numbers of new diseases which UK vets were not familiar with in the past. As the number of cases rise, vets are following updated guidelines and advice. We anticipate all vets will be introducing similar measures in the near future with many practices already testing for Brucella.

My dog has been here for 5 years, why am I having to test? Unfortunately, dogs can remain without symptoms for many years but they can still spread the disease. Your vet may recommend to test irrespective of how long ago they were imported.

Do I need to test if my dog goes abroad on holiday? The risks of infection would be low enough that this is not recommended. Close contact with other dogs, particularly strays, is the highest risk factor for infection and this is unlikely to happen on a holiday.

I don't want to test my dog, what happens now?

This is a tricky one. There is a lot of panic about this disease and people (including vets) have to make their own judgements about what is safe for them to deal with. Most vets are well-informed and educated about Brucella, and they may choose not to treat animals that have not been tested. This may be for their own personal reasons, but they do have every right to refuse service. Our advice would be to call around and find a vet that will.

My dog has already had blood testing before? If your pet has already been tested for Brucella, please keep the details and copies of lab results for your records. Please be aware that Brucellosis is not picked up from routine blood tests, it is a specific test for this particular bacteria.

How common is this disease? It is impossible to know the exact prevalence for *B. canis*, but in 2020 there were close to 70,000 dogs imported to the UK, mainly from Romania. There may well have been more than this coming through illegally. To date, there have been 3 reported cases of *B. canis* in people in the UK. Not all charities have introduced testing yet, although hopefully this will increase.